

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL: THE VOICE OF HOUSTON'S YOUTH

**In Commemoration of National Youth Service Day
Presented By the 2005-2006 Mayor's Youth Council**

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Mayor's Youth Council 2005-2006

PREFACE

The Mayor's Youth Council was started in 1998, to provide high school students the opportunity to develop leadership and citizenship skills while learning about city government. The MYC emulates the Houston City Council with a Council Chair, City Secretary, five (5) at-large and nine (9) district council positions and their accompanying senior aides. Additional positions of Chief of Staff and Special Events Coordinator have been added to involve more individuals on the Council.

Youth Council members develop a sense of personal growth and achievement, an understanding of city departments and a rapport with community leaders, citizens and elected officials. Members are called upon to help make decisions affecting Houston's youth as well as participate in numerous activities throughout the year. They hold a formal public meeting monthly, in the evening, in the Council Annex Chambers. They also plan a Town Hall meeting every 4-6 weeks in a high school or other community institution revolving around a predetermined topic(s). Each Council Member and Senior Aide is required to participate in a minimum of ten (10) community service events, some planned and organized by the MYC and some at the invitation of other organizations.

MYC members are selected to participate based on their application, a personal interview and their commitment to fully participate in and meet the objectives of the program. The term runs from September through early May. Family members have played a major role in making the MYC successful from ensuring their young student attends each meeting to participating in events themselves. Finally, the program is a success due to the support and encouragement of the Mayor and City Council members and their staff. MYC members get a first-hand view of their council offices by shadowing the Council Member and volunteering in his/her office during the year.

We are proud to transmit this first report ever from the MYC on issues important to Houston's youth. It is hoped that it will be an annual project around National Youth Service Day to provide a "voice" for Houston's Youth. We ask that our Mayor, City Council, other public officials and youth advocates will review this information and address solutions in partnership with youth. We stand ready to assist and support.

Chair: Charlecia Johnson
Chief of Staff: Eric Graves

City Secretary: Jana Hemann
Special Events Coordinator: Devon Castro-Stevenson

Council Members:

At-large Position 1: Ana Vazquez-Trejo
At-large Position 2: Zachary Garber
At-large Position 3: TaShon Thomas
At-large Position 4: Jarvis Jackson
At-large Position 5: Terry Lewis
District A: William Luton
District B: Tyrone Willis
District C: Jessica Zhao
District D: Terah Scott
District E: Emily Benigno
District F: William Garcia
District G: Nikhil Kumar
District H: Gilberto Cardenas
District I: Patrick Boateng

Senior Aides:

Robyn Garivey
Cindy Dinh
Kenneth Simon
Jabari Bailey
Britney Cooks

Sharita Palmer

Marquis Alexander

Zuri Dale
Christopher Patton
Jessica Soliz

Introduction

Millions of youth will participate in National & Global Youth Service Day, the largest service event in the world, on April 21 - 23, 2006.* They will tutor young children, engage in disaster relief, register new voters, educate their communities about good nutrition, distribute HIV/AIDs prevention materials and meet many more community needs through their service. National & Global Youth Service Day supports youth on a life-long path of service and civic engagement, and educates the public, the media, and elected officials about the role of youth as community leaders.

The 2005-2006 Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) launched a **Youth Survey** to identify the most important issues to Houston's youth commemoration of the National Youth Service Day in Houston. Youth, who reside or attend school in the City of Houston, were given the opportunity to complete the survey to have their opinions heard.

This report is a compilation of the surveys received and is being done for three (3) reasons:

- to provide a voice for Houston's youth by sharing their most important issues with Mayor Bill White and City Council Members;
- to formally communicate the 2005-06 Mayor's Youth Council findings so that others may address issues relevant to their area of responsibility, and
- to participate in the 2006 National Youth Service Day.

The report was developed through a 43-item survey divided into 5 categories*:

- Community After School Programs
- Crime and Safety
- Health Education and Outreach
- Traffic and Transportation, and
- Environment

These items were generated from the MYC members and advisors and many were based on issues identified through monthly Council meetings and Town Hall meetings. It was decided by the MYC that a 1-10 rating scale, one being the least important and 10 being the most important would be used.

Each MYC member was required to distribute and return thirty (30) completed surveys. The survey was also posted on the MYC website (www.houstontx.gov/houstonyouth) and could be completed on-line. A press release and flyer announcement* were emailed and sent to schools and media. Besides surveys received on-line, MYC members gave the survey to students attending various events at which they were volunteering.

MYC members were required to compile the scores for their thirty surveys and write a summary report on their findings*. Their surveys are also included in the overall total as well. The on-line surveys were put into a spreadsheet in order to tally and analyze the respondents' profile* and average scores for issues*.

** The following can be found in the appendix:*

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| ▪ Description of National Youth Service Day | ▪ Individual MYC members' Summary Reports |
| ▪ Survey Instrument | ▪ Totals for Respondents' Profile |
| ▪ Press Release and Flyer Announcement | ▪ Average Scores for Issues |

Profile of Respondents

A total of 834 students from around the Greater Houston Area participated in the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) survey. These students represented 87 different secondary (middle and high schools) and post-secondary (colleges and universities) schools. The students that were surveyed attend schools in Houston ISD, Humble ISD, North Forest ISD, Spring Woods ISD, Conroe ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, and Aldine ISD. The top 10 high schools with the most students surveyed are as follows:

▪ Barbara Jordan High School for Careers (Houston ISD)	173
▪ Lamar High School (Houston ISD)	113
▪ Booker T. Washington High School (Houston ISD)	53
▪ Bellaire High School (Houston ISD)	43
▪ Westside High School (Houston ISD)	30
▪ Madison High School (Houston ISD)	29
▪ Spring Woods High School (Spring Branch ISD)	29
▪ Middle College for Technology Careers High School (Houston ISD)	26
▪ Houston Can Academy (State Charter)	25
▪ Challenge Early College (Houston ISD Charter)	21

There were only 11 students from three area middle schools and three area colleges/universities represented by the survey:

▪ Dowling Middle School (HISD)	2
▪ Johnston Middle School (HISD)	1
▪ Ryan Middle School (H ISD)	1
▪ Houston Community College	2
▪ Texas Southern University	4
▪ University of Houston	1

Over 100 different zip codes were represented and all Council Districts were represented. The top zip codes were:

- 77026 - 53
- 77021 - 33
- 77020 - 31
- 77016 - 30
- 77045 - 28
- 77022 - 26
- 77033 - 25
- 77093 - 24
- 77401 - 23

Since exact addresses were not available, all council districts in a zip code were included. The council districts having the most students completing the surveys were:

- District B - 268
- District D - 219
- District H - 213
- District I - 116

There were a total of 834 students from around the Greater Houston area participating in the survey. Although the ages ranged from 12 years to 19 years, the majority of respondents were in 15 years old (15%); 16 years old (28%); 17 years old (32%) and 18 years old (14%). There were more females (56%) than males (44%) responding. The largest number of respondents were African American/Black at 38%; Hispanic at 23% and no response at 20%. However, Caucasians made up 12% of the respondents, Asians were 4% and Other was 3%. Correlating to the ages of the respondents were grades. The majority was in 9th through 12th grades, with 19% in 9th, 22% in 10th, 34% in 11th and 23% in 12th grades.

A complete profile of these respondents is as follows:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
12	1	0.1%
13	6	0.7%
14	60	7.2%
15	124	14.9%
16	236	28.3%
17	266	31.9%
18	118	14.1%
19	23	2.8%
	834	100.0%

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	370	44.4%
Female	464	55.6%
	834	100.0%

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
African Am./Black	314	37.6%
Hispanic	190	22.8%
Asian	31	3.7%
Caucasian	103	12.4%
N/A	168	20.1%
Other	28	3.4%
	834	100.0%

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
7	5	0.6%
8	4	0.5%
9	158	18.9%
10	184	22.1%
11	287	34.4%
12	190	22.8%
Freshman	6	0.7%
	834	100.0%

Findings

Of the 834 surveys, the top two quartiles of issues concerning youth ranked by average score with 10 being the most important were:

College Preparation	8.6	Flooding	7.2
Jobs for Teens	8.1	Community Parks	7.2
Exercise	7.6	HIV-AIDS	7.2
Water Pollution	7.5	Visual & Performing Arts	7.2
Air Pollution	7.4	Academic & Tutoring	7.2
Road Construction	7.4	Teen Clinics	7.1
Traffic Around Town	7.4	Nutrition	7.1
Teen Pregnancy	7.4	Public Transportation	7.1
Employment Preparation	7.4	Trees	7.1
Sports & Recreation	7.3	Recycling	7.1
Traffic	7.3		

The write-in issues could be categorized into seven broader areas:

- School-related issues
- Public Issues
- Racial/Discrimination
- Crime
- Personal Problems
- Economy
- Animals

School-related issues had eighteen (18) write-in comments, which included city promotion of academics; ethnic problems; unfair teaching policies, higher pay for teachers, upgrade computers, surveillance cameras, dress code, locking kids out during school and scholarships and financial aid.

Public Issues had fifteen (15) write-in comments, which included seven (7) about immigration; three (3) about state parks; two (2) about health care and insurance and a mention about rail system, littering and voting rights.

Eleven (11) respondents wrote in that racism and discrimination were important to them, including police discrimination; racial profiling and racial searches.

Five (5) respondents wrote in that crime was an important issue to them. Included were rape, kidnapping, adult predators, Katrina crime rate and underage drinking and driving.

Three (3) respondents wrote in that personal problems including family problems, peer pressure and self esteem were important to them.

Finally, two (2) respondents wrote in that the economy was of importance to them. In this category, jobs and gas prices were mentioned.

A complete listings of the issues and write-in comments can be found in the appendix.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the National Youth Service Day Survey, the following recommendations are made regarding the issues that were indicated to be the most important to youth living in the city of Houston.

After school activities, especially those that contribute to college preparation, ranked highly among the concerns of youth surveyed. Even though the city cannot directly affect the educational process surrounding college preparation, the city can help the youth of Houston amplify its voice in encouraging college preparation in the school districts. Comments also have been made concerning opportunities for youth to volunteer and participate in city activities themed around college preparedness and career planning. Students greatly responded to the need for more after school activities, and this was directly correlated with the desire to be greater prepared for college. One possible solution that can be applied to address many issues within the city of Houston is to formulate youth geared volunteer activities with educational themes. We must encourage students to participate in city sponsored volunteer activities in order to take care of their after school activity concern; these activities could be used as a forum to prepare students for college as well as independent life.

In order to ensure youth participation in city events, Houston must act not only as an avenue to encourage teenage volunteerism but can serve as a megaphone for the voice of the youth and become more aware of the concerns and needs of our youngest citizens through the simple act of discussion. A report from the city council to the Houston school districts at large could provide a voice for our concerns. The city can submit a report to the school districts in the Houston metropolitan area with the concerns and recommendations that have been voiced by youth.

The next area of most concern is jobs or employment for teens. The City of Houston assists teens with summer employment through the Work Source as well as co-hosting a Youth Rally and Job Fair at the George R. Brown Convention Center. However, there is always more demand than jobs available. Many of the jobs offered are in the fast-food business and teens would like the opportunity to work in an office setting. More paid internships and, perhaps, Service Learning projects, which are shorter-term and project-oriented, would be good for students in providing a professional environment and career opportunities.

The survey shows that teens are concerned about the environment and personal health. Certainly, more community service projects and Service Learning assignments would help direct their attention and efforts in these areas as a way to not only help the City but also help themselves personally with exercise and physical activity.

As shown by the results of our survey, youth would like to see the city of Houston continue to address curfew laws and gang violence. A suggestion from the youth council is to have city officials hold town hall meetings with youth, possibly during the school day, and to facilitate avenues of communication that would allow the youth of this city to see that they are cared about. The city must help motivate the youth to want to participate in city

events and the way to start this process is to show that the concerns of youth are heard by sending city officials to meet with students. These are all ways that the city government can at least have a social impact on the school system without exercising any direct control over it.

Communication is by far the greatest tool to be utilized by the city in order to address the concerns of our youth. The city must communicate ways in which kids can participate in city initiatives and demonstrate that it is open to youth input so that the youth of the city can feel like they can make a difference. Currently the city initiatives are not highly publicized and potentially interested students are not informed of how to participate. The city must take advantage of all forms of media and marketing in order to show city youth that the government cares. The Mayor's Youth council is a great step in this direction of open communication between youth and the city and pledges to pursue actively a more productive avenue of communication.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this survey the MYC has conducted for Houston's youth is a useful first effort and will improve and become an annual tradition for future MYC's. It will be interesting to see how trends might change over time. Most importantly, it is hoped this information is used by the next MYC in planning its agenda, by other institutions serving youth, and by our Mayor and City Council Members to whom we respectfully submit this report and recommendations.

2005-2006 Mayor's Youth Council Members

(A complete roster can be found in the appendices)